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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED
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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA: ZUMA'S HOTLINE FAILING TO OVERCOME
HANG-UPS

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) The South African government admitted on December 2 that the presidential hotline, launched in September with great fanfare, is failing to handle thousands of callers seeking to register complaints with the administration. President Jacob Zuma established the telephone hotline as a way for the public to lodge complaints dealing with poor service delivery and corruption by public officials. However, Zuma last week admitted, "The presidential hotline is not able to handle the call load at this stage."

12. (SBU) Only 9,190 of the 30,650 calls to the hotline between September 14 and November 27 were resolved. The government said provincial administrations have been the slowest in responding to complaints registered with the hotline, with only 18 percent of the calls resolved during the past three months. National government departments fared somewhat better, with 33 percent of the calls resolved. The government said that most complaints to the hotline dealt with crime, housing shortages, unfair labor practices, difficulties with banks and insurance companies, breaches of contracts signed by government departments, and requests for funding. The administration noted, "Even if we were to scale up the number of call agents, we can only do so up to a certain limit -- given that resources are limited." Despite limited resources, however, Zuma reportedly has urged all Premiers and Ministers to take steps to address complaints and "ensure all inquires transferred to them for investigation are responded to urgently and efficiently."

13. (C) COMMENT: Poor responses by national departments and local and provincial governments to complaints to the presidential hotline are undermining one of Zuma's biggest domestic initiatives. Zuma's personal popularity probably will not falter in the short run because of this shortcoming.

Indeed, many commentators give him positive marks at least for trying, and compare this favorably with the Mbeki administration's notorious deafness to criticism. In the longer term, however, the continuing failure by national departments and local governments to address citizens' complaints adequately -- a failure which has helped spawn hundreds of service delivery protests across the country in recent months -- threatens to damage the African National Congress's prospects in the 2011 local elections. END
COMMENT.
GIPS